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TRENDS IN THE RACIAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE POPULATION OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK BETWEEN 1950 AND 1957: AN ECOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRENDS IN THE RACIAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE POPULATION OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK BETWEEN 1950 AND 1957: AN ECOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

This survey of trends in the racial distribution of the population of the City of New York was made possible because both the decennial census of 1950 and the special census of 1957 reported the racial composition of census tracts. The Planning Commission of the City of New York computed the racial proportions of the population in each census tract for 1950 and also for 1957. What follows is an ecological trend analysis in which the census tract is the tabulation unit. The organization of the report is as follows: first, a description of the situation as of 1950 for the city as a whole and for each of the five boroughs separately; second, an analysis of the extent of change, again for the city as a whole and for each borough separately; and, finally, a description of how matters stood in 1957.

I

Approximately half the census tracts in New York City were exclusively white in 1950 (Table I-1). Manhattan had the smallest percentage of all-white censustracts (7.69%) and Queens had the largest (60.48%). The other boroughs ranked between them, in this order: Richmond, 39.47%; The Bronx, 43.85%; Brooklyn, 51.42%. (See Appendix Table 1-b) Therefore it can be stated that in 1950 fewer than half of all the census tracts

in the city as a whole were all white. This was true also in three of the five boroughs.

TABLE I-1

Proportion of Non-white Population in New York City Census Tracts, 1950

Proportion of Non-Whites in Census Tracts	Proportion of Census Tracts
None	47.02%
Less than 1%	26.82
1 - 9.9	15.66
10 - 24.9	3.65
25 - 49.9	2.43
50 - 74.9	1.66
75% or more	2.76
Total Tracts = 100%	(2,465)

Caution is required in interpreting these figures in a segregation-desegregation context. In the first place, the segregation-desegregation pattern is a continuum at any given time, and where to draw the line between the two parts is a matter of arbitrary choice. In the second place, the proportion of non-whites residing in mainly white areas under conditions of socio-economic inequality with the white residents, Negroes

holding jobs such as building superintendents or domestic servants, is unknown. It will be noted (Table I-1, that the racial distribution of the total population of the city in 1950 was skewed strongly to the left with decreasing proportions of census tracts in each succeeding category except the last one. The modally typical distribution for the city as a whole (see Table I-1) was the all-white census tract, for 47.02% of all the census tracts were in this category. The distribution for Brooklyn, largest of the five boroughs, most closely resembled the distribution pattern for the city as a whole. Manhattan departed from the pattern in being the only borough where the single largest proportion of census tracts (41.96%) had non-white residents but only in the proportion of less than 1% of the population -- and the census tract having a non-white population of less than 1% was the modally typical census tract for this borough. Manhattan also was the only borough that had a substantial (12.24%) proportion of census tracts having 75% or more non-white residents. Richmond, too, departed markedly from the city pattern in having an unusually large proportion of tracts with a 1-9% representation of non-whites and no tracts with 50% or more of the population non-white. The Richmond distribution was thus bi-modal.

The slope of these distributions describes crudely the extent to which racial segregation was the custom in the City of New York in 1950. A bell-shaped or normal curve would be more characteristic of desegregation. It is quite clear that of all the boroughs Manhattan alone approaches this type of curve. A final set of figures on this point: For the city as a whole, 89.50% of the census tracts had non-white populations in 1950

that were smaller than 10% of the total populations of the census tracts. The comparable statistics for each of the boroughs were as follows: Manhattan, 75.17%; The Bronx, 91.50%; Brooklyn, 90.46%; Queens, 91.93%; Richmond, 94.74%.

II

Between the decennial census of 1950 and the special census of 1957 the racial composition of almost 65% of the census tracts in the City of New York underwent a change. The change was more often an increase (45.84%) in the proportion of non-whites than a decrease (18.54%), the ratio being more than two census tracts to one. (See Table II-1.)

Whether an increase or a decrease, these changes were most frequently of small proportion. Thus, of the census tracts that showed an increase in non-white population, more than 4 out of 10 showed an increase of less than 1%; the same is true of 7 out of 10 census tracts that showed a decrease in non-white population. As may be seen from Appendix Table 2, Brooklyn, partly because it is the largest borough, most resembled the pattern for the city as a whole, while Manhattan was first both in the number of tracts that showed an increase and in the number that showed a decrease in the proportion of non-white residents.

TABLE II-1

Change in Racial Proportions of Population of Census Tracts in New York City, 1950 - 1957

Extent of Change	Proportion of Census Tracts
None	35.62%
Increase	45.84
Less than 1%	19.55
1 - 9.9	17.40
10 - 24.9	5.03
25 - 49.9	2.72
50 - 74.9	0.98
75% or more	0.16
Decrease	18.54
Less than 1%	13.67
1 - 9.9	4.10
10 - 24.9	0.57
25 - 49.9	0.20
50% or more	0.00
Total = 100%	(2,465)

Where did the changes occur? The data describe roughly the extent to which racial segregation remained customary between 1950 and 1957 -- and the extent to which it did not. As Table II-2 indicates, the extent to which the population of non-whites increased in a census tract between 1950 and 1957 depended markedly on the proportion of non-whites already resident in the area.

TABLE II-2

Proportionate Increases in Non-white Population, 1950-1957, by Proportion of Non-white Population in 1950

Proportionate Increase in Non-white Population of Census Tracts, 1950-1957	Proportion of Non-white Population in Census Tracts in New York City in 1950			
	None	Less than 1%	1-9.9%	10% or more
None	70.58%	12.57%	1.90%	3.08%
Less than 1%	19.84	48.20	14.76	12.82
1 - 9.9%	5.70	32.31	60.99	38.97
10% or more	3.88	6.92	22.35	45.13
Total census tracts in which proportion of non-whites increased	(1,159)	(390)	(264)	(195)

Thus a comparison of the areas classified according to proportion of non-whites in 1950 shows that the proportion of census tracts in which the non-white population increased 10% or more from 1950 to 1957 rose steadily from 3.88% (among the all-white tracts) to 45.13% (among the tracts with a non-white population of 10% or more).

Yet another piece of information on the source of the changes in racial distribution of population between 1950 and 1957 may be found in Table II-3, which compares proportionate increases and decreases by non-white concentrations in 1950. This table shows clearly the tendency for the increases in non-white population from 1950 to 1957 to occur more often in proportion to the non-whites already in the area. The table

shows also a clear tendency for the decreases between 1950 and 1957 to occur more often in the census tracts "less than 1%" non-white than in the census tracts "1-9.9%" non-white and more often in the latter category than in the tracts "10% or more" non-white. Also of interest is the fact that the proportion of census tracts that changed varies negatively with the racial composition of the tracts in 1950. Of those census tracts exclusively non-white in 1950, 71% did not change; of those less than 1% non-white, 7.4% did not change; of those 1-9.9% non-white, 1.3% did not change. Thereafter the figure rises to 2.3% for the 10%-or-more group.

TABLE II-3

Proportionate Change in Non-white Population of New York City Census Tracts, 1950-1957, by Proportion of Non-white Population in 1950

	Proportion of Non-white Population in 1950			
	None	Less than 1%	1-9.9%	10% or more
No Change	70.6%	7.4%	1.3%	2.3%
Increase	29.4	51.6	67.1	73.0
Decrease	0.0	41.0	31.6	24.7
Total Census Tracts = 100%	(1,159)	(661)	(286	(259)

Table II-3 describes the average relationship between the initial racial composition of census tracts in 1950 and the rate and type of subsequent change. The breakdowns for the five boroughs are given in

Appendix Table 3. Trends in Brooklyn and Richmond follow those of the city pattern fairly closely. Manhattan is particularly notable for the smaller-than-average proportion of census tracts in the "10% or more" group that decreased in proportion of non-whites. The Bronx is not notably above average in this respect, but the downward trend in the relationship between the non-white concentration in 1950 and decreases thereafter is not consistent (uninterrupted) here. Queens is notable for the above-average increase in the "10% or more" non-white group.

A close-up look at some of the exceptions to the general pattern would be instructive but will not be attempted at this time. There is, for example, a relatively small number of tracts in each borough (except in Richmond, where the number is larger) that registered neither an increase nor a decrease in racial proportions. What makes these areas different from the others? Likewise, consider the areas that were all-white in 1950 but that gained non-whites by 1957: Were these all fringe areas? And if not, how do they differ from the others?

III

How stood matters in 1957? For the city as a whole, the distribution of census tracts with varying proportions of non-whites is presented in Table III-1.

TABLE III - 1

Proportion of Non-white Population
in New York City Census Tracts, 1957

Proportion of Non-whites in Census Tracts	Proportion of Census Tracts
None	40.89%
Less than 1%	23.65
1 - 9.9	19.07
10 - 24.9	5.76
25 - 49.9	4.06
50 - 74.9	2.47
75% or more	4.10
Total Tracts = 100%	(2,465)

As in 1950, the all-white census tract was modally typical of the city as a whole. But the proportion of such tracts decreased from 47.02% (Table I-1) to 40.89% (Table III-1). In this seven-year period the proportion of census tracts with fewer than 1% non-whites also diminished -- from 26.82% to 23.65%. The proportion of census tracts in all other categories increased.

Readers of these data may feel that the diminution in the proportion of all-white tracts represents a gain for integration; on the other hand, they may feel that the increase in the proportion of tracts 50% or more non-white does not represent a gain.

The interpretation is not a simple one, for while there has indeed occurred a wider distribution of non-whites for the city as a whole (and dispersal is an accepted measure of integration) apparently the areas of non-white concentration also have expanded (and concentration is, of course, the usual indicator of residential segregation). Appendix Table 4 presents the proportion of Negro population in census tracts for each borough as of 1957. Of all the boroughs, not Richmond but Queens had the largest proportion of all-white census tracts, as in 1950; Manhattan had the fewest, again as in 1950.

But Manhattan is also the only borough in which the proportion of all-white census tracts increased-- from 7.69% to 10.80%, or, in absolute terms, from 22 to 31. This is, of course, a net increase. Actually, a total of 16 Manhattan census tracts changed to all-white in the seven-year period. In Table III-2 comparable figures are given for all the boroughs in 1957 and, in parallel columns, the proportion of non-whites in the census-tract population seven years earlier (1950)

TABLE III-2

Census Tracts in Which the Racial Distribution of the Population Changed to All-white Between 1950 and 1957

Borough	Total Number of Tracts That Became All-white Between 1950 and 1957	Number of Newly All-white Tracts (1957) Proportion of Non-whites in 1950: Under 1%	1 - 9.9%	10% or More
Bronx	47	39	4	4
Brooklyn	66	50	12	4
Manhattan	16	10	5	1
Queens	50	38	8	4
Richmond	7	6	1	0
TOTAL	186	143	30	13

The major point of this table is that residential integration once attained is not necessarily attained forever. While 3 out of 4 (76.88%) of the census tracts that became all-white in 1957 had been almost all-white in 1950 -- and a strong question may be raised whether tracts under 1% in non-white populatior should not be classed as segregated because of the way the statistics behave -- there were 43 tracts in which the loss of non-white population appears to have been substantial. The tracts that became all-white (186) are no more than a fourth of the number of all-white tracts that gained non-white residents: 7.5% compared with 29.4%. However, they serve to remind us that the changing neighborhood or changing community changes away from non-white occupancy as well as toward it. Thus the processes of urban change are not all in the direction of increasing dispersion of non-whites.

As to the shapes of the racial distributions of the population in 1957 in each borough, no two boroughs were quite alike. Brooklyn, the largest borough (Appendix Table 4b), most closely resembled the average distribution for New York City as a whole (Table III-1); that is, skewed to the left with smaller proportions of census tracts per category as the non-white population increases except for the last category. Again, as in 1950, Manhattan most nearly resembled a normal curve, while Richmond and, to a lesser extent, the Bronx were bi-modal, and Queens tended toward a "U" shape. (See Appendix Table 4.)

Summary:-- The following points stand out as salient in this ecological description of racial trends in New York City between 1950

and 1957:

1. Between these two years the racial composition of 65% of the census tracts changed. This change was toward an increase in the proportion of non-whites twice as often as toward a decrease.
2. The extent of the change in any given area depends strongly on the initial racial composition of the area.
3. The larger the proportion of non-whites in an area in 1950, the greater the proportionate increase of non-whites between 1950 and 1957. One hundred eighty-six census tracts (or 7.5% of the total) that had some non-whites in 1950 had none in 1957.

Appendix Table 1

Proportion of Non-white Population in Census Tracts in Each Borough, in 1950

Proportion of Non-white Population	Table 1-a Bronx Census Tracts	Table 1-b Brooklyn Census Tracts	Table 1-c Manhattan Census Tracts
None	43.85%	51.42%	7.69%
Less than 1%	31.10	25.00	41.96
1 - 9.9	16.55	14.04	25.52
10 - 24.9	3.36	33.62	6.64
25 - 49.9	3.13	2.19	3.15
50 - 74.9	1.12	1.54	2.80
75% or more	0.89	2.19	12.24
Total Tracts = 100%	(447)	(912)	(286)

Proportion of Non-white Population	Table 1-d Queens Census Tracts	Table 1-e Richmond Census Tracts
None	60.48%	39.47%
Less than 1%	21.53	19.30
1 - 9.9	9.92	35.97
10 - 24.9	2.69	3.51
25 - 49.9	2.13	1.75
50 - 74.9	1.98	0.00
75% or more	1.27	0.00
Total Tracts = 100%	(706)	(114)

Appendix Table 2

Change in Racial Proportions of Population
in Census Tracts by Borough, 1950-1957

Extent of Change in Non-white Proportion	Bronx	Brooklyn	Manhattan	Queens	Richmond
None	33.11%	38.71%	10.14%	49.90%	27.19%
Increase	49.89	44.19	65.38	36.83	50.00
Less than 1%	17.23	19.52	25.17	17.99	24.56
1 - 9.9	25.28	15.46	34.62	7.08	22.81
10 -24.9	5.15	5.59	4.89	4.67	2.63
25 -49.9	2.01	3.40	0.35	3.68	0.00
0 -74.9	0.22	0.22	0.00	2.98	0.00
75% or more	0.00	0.00	0.35	0.43	0.00
Decrease	17.00	17.10	24.48	18.27	22.81
Less than 1%	12.53	13.05	13.99	15.01	14.04
1 - 9.9	2.91	3.40	9.79	2.69	8.77
10 -24.9	0.89	0.65	0.35	0.43	0.00
25 -49.9	0.67	0.00	0.35	0.14	0.00
50 -74.9	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
75% or more	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Appendix Table 3

Proportionate Change in Non-white Borough Population, 1950-1957, by Proportion of Non-white Population in 1950

	Proportion of Non-white Population in 1950: None	Less than 1%	1 - 9.9%	10% or more
The Bronx				
No Change	71.9%	3.6%	1.3%	2.7%
Increase	28.1	60.4	83.8	68.4
Decrease	0.0	36.0	14.9	28.9
Total tracts = 100%	(196)	(139)	(74)	(38)
Brooklyn				
No Change	69.9	10.9	0.0	0.0
Increase	30.1	47.4	62.5	85.1
Decrease	0.0	41.7	37.5	14.9
Total tracts = 100%	(469)	(228)	(128)	(87)
Manhattan				
No Change	63.6	5.0	5.5	7.1
Increase	36.4	71.7	74.0	54.9
Decrease	0.0	23.3	20.5	38.0
Total Tracts = 100%	(22)	(120)	(73)	(71)
Queens				
No Change	71.2	8.6	0.0	0.0
Increase	28.8	57.2	50.0	87.7
Decrease	0.0	34.2	50.0	12.3
Total Tracts = 100%	(427)	(152)	(70)	(57)
Richmond				
No Change	68.9	0.0	0.0	0.0
Increase	31.1	50.0	68.3	66.7
Decrease	0.0	50.0	31.7	33.3
Total Tracts =100%	(45)	(22)	(41)	(6)

Appendix Table 4

Proportion of Non-white Population in Census Tracts in Each Borough, in 1957

Proportion of Non-White Population	Table 4-a Bronx Census Tracts	Table 4-b Brooklyn Census Tracts	Table 4-c Manhattan Census Tracts
None	42.72%	43.20%	10.80%
Less than 1%	17.23	25.55	23.35
1 - 9.9	25.73	16.34	35.89
10 - 24.9	6.71	5.26	10.10
25 - 49.9	4.70	4.39	4.18
50 - 74.9	2.24	2.08	2.09
75% or more	0.67	3.18	13.59
Tota. Tracts = 100%	(447)	(912)	(286)

	Table 4-d Queens	Table 4-e Richmond
None	50.00%	35.96%
Less than 1%	26.63	14.04
1 - 9.9	8.50	38.60
10 - 24.9	3.40	9.65
25 - 49.9	3.54	1.75
50 - 74.9	3.68	0.00
75% or more	4.25	0.00
Total Tracts = 100%	(706)	(114)

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